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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

#### DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

#### 19 October 1988

Middle East: Increasing Regional Strategic Airstrike Capabilities

### Summary

Dramatic increases in the long-range airstrike capabilities of several Middle Eastern countries are likely over the next few years and will--together with the acquisition of ballistic missiles by many of these same countries-contribute to the growing strategic vulnerability of states throughout the region. Israel, Iraq, and Libya are improving their existing strike capabilities, and a number of other countries, including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Oman, and Kuwait, are building similiar forces. Although the proliferation of ballistic missiles has received more attention recently, the introduction of improved airstrike capabilities may have greater significance for the military balance in the Middle East.

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#### Experienced Air Forces With Growing Power

The Israeli Air Force has demonstrated exceptional proficiency in conducting long-range attack missions. Israel's attack against Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor in 1981 and the 1985 strike on PLO headquarters in Tunis were missions in which distant targets were struck with minimal collateral damage--and with no loss of aircraft. The raid on Osirak was a particularly notable strategic success, dealing the Iraqi nuclear program a severe blow.

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This memorandum was prepared by the Issues and Applications Division, Office of Near Easte and South Asian Analysis.	rn
Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to Chief, Issues and Applications Division	e

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Israel's capabilities will grow as it acquires and modifies the 24 two-seat F-16Ds that Tel Aviv is purchasing from the United States under the Peace Marble II program. These capabilities would be further enhanced if Israel decides to purchase the F-15E, a variant of the F-15 specifically designed for long-range strike missions and equipped with the latest low-level night navigation and attack technology.

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Iraq has developed its long-range strike capabilities during the course of the Iran-Iraq war. With the help of antiship missiles, air-to-air refueling, and the use of stopovers in friendly Gulf Arab states, the Iraqis have been able to strike shipping as far south as the Straits of Hormuz, as well as conduct air attacks against Tehran and targets in northeastern Iran. Iraq's capabilities will increase in the near term, as the Soviet SU-24 (Fencer) light bomber is integrated into its air force. The Fencer, with its longer range, better payload, and enhanced penetration and electronic warfare equipment, will enable Iraq to complete similar missions more effectively and without stopovers or aerial refueling.

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Though relying on less sophisticated aircraft and operating in a less demanding air defense environment, Libya has also conducted strategic strike operations, bombing a radio/TV broadcasting facility in Omdurman (a suburb of Khartoum, Sudan) in 1984, and the airport at N'Djamena, Chad in 1986 and 1987. At present, however, Libya's only long-range strike capability is formed by its five aging Soviet TU-22 (Blinder) bombers, which we believe would be ineffective in attacks against well-defended targets--a deficiency highlighted by the loss of a TU-22 during the unsuccessful 1987 air attack on N'Djamena airport. Libya's probable acquisition of Soviet Fencers within the next year will dramatically improve the strike capabilities of Qadhafi's air force, particularly its ability to penetrate modern air defenses.

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### Newcomers with Developing Capabilities

Over the past two years, new and as yet unused long-range strike aircraft have come into regional inventories, and additional deliveries are expected during the next 3-5 years. These new aircraft offer the option of aerial refueling to increase further the potential radius of action, and they have better navigation-attack systems (e.g., terrain-following radars and infrared imaging for target acquisition), improved countermeasures gear, and larger and more sophisticated weapons capabilities than the aircraft they are replacing.

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Saudi Arabia already has 20 British-built Tornados in its inventory and will have at least 72 by the mid-1990s.

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Kuwait will acquire 40 US F/A-18s in the 1991-93 timeframe, Jordan will receive 8 Tornados in 1991-92, and Oman should take delivery of its 8 Tornados by 1992. We believe Iraq has already begun receiving the SU-24, and we anticipate that initial deliveries of this aircraft to Syria and Libya will probably follow within the next year. The Algerians also have been negotiating with the Soviets since at least 1986 to purchase Fencers, but acquisition is more uncertain, mainly because of financial considerations.
Going the Extra Mile
Aerial refueling capabilities are also likely to proliferate in the region. Aerial tankers complicate the problems of regional air defenses by permitting regional air forces to extend their range of operation, spend more time over target, carry maximum ordnance, and expand their mission profiles—attacking from unexpected directions or flying more of their missions at low altitudes.
Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Morocco are the only regional states that currently have strategic tanker aircraft in their inventories, although Iraq has employed effective, though less capable, "buddy" refueling using its French F-1Es. Several other countries will probably acquire tanker aircraft over the next few years. Libya, has an especially active program to develop C-130 and Boeing 707 tanker
modifications for use with some of its F-1 aircraft.
Egypt is planning to purchase tanker
modification kits for three of its Boeing 707s, and the
German firm of Messerschmitt-Bolkow-Blohm is offering to convert A300 airliners into tankers or to build tanker
variants of the A310 Airbus for interested customers, according to press reports.
The Impact: Attack Versus Defense
Even well-layered defenses with airborne early warning platforms, automated command and control systems, modern fighters, and surface-to-air missiles will have a difficult time parrying determined attacks by these more capable
1Mission ranges with air refueling are highly scenario dependent on such factors as number of strike aircraft, weapons loading, and number and type of refueling aircraft.
2"Buddy" refueling enables one tactical aircraft to refuel

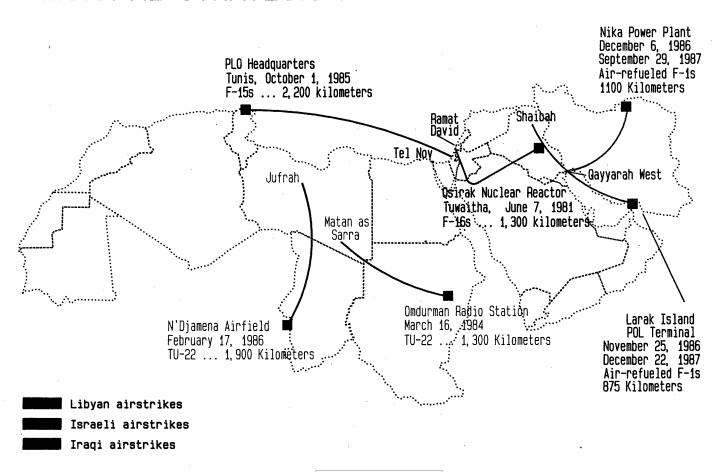
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aircraft. Earlier detection and longer-range air-to-air missiles will result in battles between air defenders and attackers being initiated at longer ranges, permitting time for some attrition of the attacking force, but the use of longer range, precision-guided air-to-ground munitions, including a proliferation of antiradiation missiles to suppress air defense radars, will greatly improve capabilities for stand-off attacks.	25X1
Strategic air power also may be enhanced by the use of ballistic missiles in support of airstrikes. Disruption of air defense radars and command and control with missile attacks, for example, could pave the way for airstrikes.	25X1
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Effective utilization of electronic warfare by an attacking force will be a key to success. Israel retains a clear advantage in this critical area over other regional air forcessome of which, such as Saudi Arabia, are notably deficient. Strategic airstrike potential will also, of course, depend on the competence and courage of pilots and good maintenance practices to keep aircraft fully mission capable.	25X1
The Bottom Line: Growing Strategic Vulnerability	
2 DOUGH DING. GLOWING DELUCEGIC VUINCIADILITY	
Although regional air defense capabilities are improving, we anticipate air attack capabilities will grow at a faster rate, thereby leaving strategic targets more vulnerable. We believe Israel will retain its qualitative and operational edge in regional long-range airstrike capabilities, but, at the same time, will itself become more vulnerable to strategic air attack than ever before.	25X1
Proliferation of longer range and more capable strike aircraft, in our view, will probably make it more difficult to control escalation in a future war. These capabilities will facilitate the involvement of additional countries in a conflict, enabling Libya or Iraq, for example, to attack Israel more easily and swiftly in support of other Arab states. Improved long-range air power will also facilitate attacks against strategic military and economic targets in rear areas that may be located in or near major population centers. Such attacks could lead to retaliatory strikes against civilian targets.	25X1
We believe long-range airstrikes are likely to be the principal and most effective means for attacking strategic targets in the Middle East. Although the proliferation of	

ballistic missiles will continue to have major political and psychological implications, the strategic military impact of ballistic missiles will be less than that of the improved long-range airstrike capabilities. The inaccuracy of most currently available missile systems, the relatively limited

numbers of ballistic missiles likely to be available over
the next five years, and their limited payload capabilities
will render them less useful than aircraft for conventional
or chemicalattacks against military and economic
targets.

# REGIONAL STRATEGIC AIRSTRIKES



# SELECTED AIRCRAFT COMPARISONS

Yaz			t Radi	lus I Refuel Maximum Maxipayloc	<b>λ</b>		, Radi	Refuel Maximumad
COUNTRY	Olg	Cowp	Aerio A	Maximaloc	Hem	Cowp	Aerial	Maximaloga
Saudi Arabia	F-5	400	Yes	3, 000	Tornado	925	Yes	8, 000
Kuwait	<b>A-4</b>	630	No	3, 700	F/A-18	900	Yes	7, 000
Oman	Jaguar	925	Yes	3, 500	Tornado	925	Yes	8, 000
Syria	MiG-23	500	No	2, 000	SU-24	920	Yes	8, 000
Jordan _	F-5	400	No	3, 000	Tornado	925	Yes	8, 000
Libya	F-1	600	Yes	3, 500	SU-24	920	Yes	8, 000
Algeria	Mi6-23	500	No	2, 000	SU-24	920	Yes	8, 000

Combat radius is estimated in kilometers and assumes a high-low-low-high flight profile with external tanks and MIL C fuel reserves. Radius could be extended approximately 20-25% by using a high-low-high flight profile. Payloads are in kilograms.

